



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*** NEWS RELEASE ***

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CONTACT: Patrick Gasper, Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

Burmaster recognizes 2007 Friends of Education

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster recognized nine individuals and two foundations for the significant contributions they make to public education in Wisconsin. Burmaster presented her 2007 Friends of Education awards during her state of education address Thursday at the Capitol.

“These individuals understand that education is the foundation of our democracy and that our long-term economic security and quality of life depends on how we educate this generation,” she said.

Burmaster presented awards to

Julia Burney Witherspoon of Kenosha, retired Racine police officer and founder and executive director of the Cops ‘N Kids Reading Program. From its simple beginnings of one officer distributing books from the back of her squad car, the Cops ‘N Kids Reading Program has grown to 50 chapters in the United States as well as one international chapter in the Netherlands. Additionally, the program has expanded to include reading centers that offer tutoring, computer classes, library services, creative arts opportunities, and family outreach.

CUNA Mutual Group Foundation of Madison, represented by Executive Director Steve Goldberg, for various programs that serve students, educators, and communities. Those programs include, student scholarships; Kinder Ready, to strengthen the kindergarten readiness of low-income and children of color to close the kindergarten readiness gap; Courage to Teach, professional development that helps educators redefine their commitment and approach to the teaching profession; financial support and in-kind assistance for programs for at-risk youth; and support for financial literacy efforts through Project Reach, in which the Urban League of Greater Madison places teens of color in internships with local employers and teaches them practical money management skills. The foundation also works to increase community involvement in Madison schools through the Principal for a Day, Adopt-A-School, and Lend a Hand programs.

Verna Fowler of Keshena, Menominee Indian leader and longtime advocate for the educational advancement of American Indians. She is founding president of the College of the Menominee Nation and president of the American Indian College Fund Board. Fowler has more than 30 years of service to education in Wisconsin, having taught at the elementary, secondary, and collegiate levels, and has been an administrator of schools at the elementary as well as the collegiate level. Additionally, Fowler serves on the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities and as vice president of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, which includes all tribal colleges and universities in the United States.

Karen Harden, executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Band in Hayward. Through her leadership, the Boys and Girls Club provides services and prevention programs to

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children and youth ages 6 to 16. Programming includes Ojibwe culture, sports, recreation, and health wellness training as well as substance abuse prevention education. Club youth participate in community service-learning activities, provide assistance to community elders, and participate in a school powwow.

Sen. Herb Kohl of Milwaukee, who was elected to the U. S. Senate in 1988. Kohl established the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation in 1990, which annually provides scholarships to nearly 200 Wisconsin students and awards to 100 teachers and their schools. After 17 years, the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation has awarded \$6.35 million to educators, students, and schools throughout the state. With Congress in session, Kim Cates accepted the award on behalf of Kohl.

Brian LaViolette Scholarship Foundation, established by Doug, Kim, and Renee LaViolette of Oneida, in honor of Doug and Renee's son, Brian, who was 15 when he died in a swimming accident. The foundation gives out student scholarships in memory of military personnel who have died in combat as well as in the names of Medal of Honor winners. The foundation also presents distinguished student and foreign student awards and other scholarships. The foundation donated a special edition copy of the book "Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty" to school libraries throughout the state, and the foundation brought the Congressional Medal of Honor National Convention to Green Bay. Dan Nerad, superintendent of the Green Bay Area School District, accepted the award on behalf of the LaViolette family.

Houa Lee of Weston, who has been the minority student adviser at Northcentral Technical College in Wausau for about 20 years. He assists adults and high school students in attaining postsecondary education and serves as a strong advocate for the Hmong people with service on the Wausau Area Hmong Association Board and throughout the Wausau community. Since his arrival in the United States as a young refugee in the early 1980s, Lee has been a role model and mentor for those seeking to improve their lives through educational opportunities.

Susan Lipp of Middleton, president of Full Compass, who is a champion for music education in our state and nation. Currently on the board of directors for the National Association of Music Merchants and the International Music Products Association, Lipp is passionate about influencing education reform legislation in Washington, D.C., and stopping the loss of music education programs. Her advocacy includes the importance of music in supporting academic success in math, science, and reading. Her company, Full Compass, also provides equipment such as microphones, lighting systems, amplifiers, and speakers to schools and other performance venues.

Dester Martin, founding executive director of the African American Chamber of Commerce in Milwaukee. He is dedicated to expanding job opportunities for all residents of the city by creating the next generation of African American business owners and entrepreneurs. By setting education goals to increase academic achievement, attendance rates, and the number of African American students in trade and apprenticeship programs, the Chamber has set a blueprint for economic development. Martin works with the Alliance for Attendance and many other community endeavors.

Dr. John Mielke, who has served on the Appleton Area Board of Education since 1992 and founded and serves on the board of the Appleton Education Foundation. Mielke, a physician, was one of the original organizers for Education for Healthy Kids, a K-3 daily physical education and academic health program. He, and his wife Sally, also started United for Reading Success, a tutorial reading program for first grade students. Mielke serves on other local and state committees, including the Mielke Family Foundation, Appleton Downtown Inc., and the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts and Letters.

Rev. Carmen Porco of Madison, executive director of Housing Ministries of American Baptists in Wisconsin, which develops low-income housing communities in Madison and Milwaukee. The heart of the communities rests in technologically equipped learning centers that help close the digital divide and promote education and access to higher-paying jobs. The centers provide childcare, Head Start, and school-age programs; tutoring sessions and college preparation offerings; and adult education and university degree courses to address the urban challenges of housing, education, and economic development.

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